



To:

From:



Celebrating
Every Kind of Mom

a
mother's
LOVE

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by (in)courage
Anna Rendell, General Editor





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Introduction

We are the moms who hug, dance, and snuggle. We are the moms who get overwhelmed, whose snarls sometimes come easier than our smiles. We are the moms who live in the push-pull of exhaustion and joy, in the tumultuous world of feelings and guilt and giving all of ourselves.

We are the moms who pray our children will fly while a tiny part of our heart grieves their flight from us, because we are the moms who love those children with every fiber of our being. We're not sure where they end and we begin, but we know we didn't begin until they arrived.

We are the moms who work around the clock in a million different ways. Praying. Cooking. Cleaning up. Carpooling to school and dropping off at daycare. Guiding. Loving, always loving. Scolding and worrying. Kissing boo-boos and wiping tears. Breathing deep, in and out, over and over. Chasing their feet and their hearts. Answering emails in the middle of the night. Pulling them back and drawing them in and sending them out. Scrubbing toilets and remembering details and packing lunches and signing papers and pouring out.

We are the moms who love children we didn't birth. We are the neighbors, aunts, sisters, friends, and church grandmas who love these kids as though they're our own. We snuggle up during the sermon at church to beloved little ones and pass them hard candies to squelch the wiggles. We attend birthday parties and graduations and weddings, bearing gifts for these dear hearts, setting up tables and making food and then cleaning up at the end of the day. We rock little babies and help big kids pack for college, tearing up at the thought of them driving away. We light up when our phone dings and it's a text from that precious high

schooler. We read stories and sing songs and carefully choose cards to pop in the mail for every holiday.

We are the moms who haven't had a night out in ages, and who crave one like oxygen. Who run on grace and caffeine. Who build a meal off of the scraps pilfered from kids' plates. Who go through more coffee shop drive-throughs than we care to admit. Who are exhausted from being "on" all day at work, and coming home to be "on" all night.

We are the moms who drive through McDonald's for milk because we're out at home and just cannot drag ourselves into the actual grocery store. Who pay for a latte in change dug out from between the minivan seats. Who cannot make it to church without bickering with our family on the drive. Who are consistently seven minutes late to every appointment. Who perpetually lose socks to the washing machine, and have been known to purchase new underwear instead of washing the pairs we already own. Who take our alone time seriously and guard it fiercely—just like we do our kids.

We are the moms who long for more. More grace. More patience. More coffee. More time (always more time). More space—in home and heart. More money. More sleep. More Christ in us. More life in our days. More quiet.

At the same time, we are the moms who long for less. Less laundry. Less fighting. Less yelling. Less clutter. Less selfishness. Less guilt. Less busy. Less stuff. Less dust. Less hustle.

We are the moms who sit in the hallway in tears during bedtime, drained. The moms who sit in empty houses in tears because there are no more babies to tuck in at bedtime. We are the moms who ache for those we've lost, for those we've wanted, for those we've asked for, for those whom we've begged God about and bruised our knees in earnest prayer. For the babies we couldn't carry. For the children we've lost to heaven and red tape. For the grown children we couldn't hold on to as

they flew our coop to make their lives. For waywards and prodigals and could've-beens.

We love this life even when we don't like it very much. We love these kids with all of our being—even when we may not like them very much.

We thank God for the gift of love He gives in the form of sticky hands, flown coops, late nights, early mornings, birthday celebrations, cards in the mail, trips to see each other, texts sent, calls placed, and prayers whispered.

We are these moms, and this book is for us all.

May you find yourself and someone you love amidst these pages. May you be inspired, uplifted, refreshed, and renewed to go forth and love those kids. This is for you, one-of-a-kind mom!



1. Love

That Breaks the Mold

One of the most important women in my life isn't related to me at all, yet my kids call her Grandma. She loves our family and has taken us all under her heart as if her own. She is a woman whose love has broken the mold of what is often considered family.

Countless women don't hold children in their arms or raise them in their homes. They are affectionately known as bonus moms, church grandmas, aunts, nanas, and a number of other titles. These women celebrate birthdays, cook meals, give rides, help with laundry, and offer love to their "extra" kids, grandkids, nieces, nephews, neighbors, and kids at church, and their presence in our lives is imperative. What would our village be without them? Pretty empty, that's what.

This section is full of stories for and about these mothers, the precious women who break the mold of motherhood. These are women throughout Scripture—and in our lives—who gave of themselves when it wasn't a requirement or demand, but simply out of an abundance of love.

To the "bonus moms" of the world . . . thank you. Bless you. You are adored and needed and loved beyond measure.



Mothering Is . . .

Mothering may not look like what we thought it would look like.

It doesn't look like it does in the movies or TV shows. Or most of our social media feeds. Or our friends' lives. Or any version of what we thought it would look like at all.

It may look like loving other people's children. It may look like loving your neighbors, your nephews and nieces, the kids growing up in your home, and the kids growing up in your church.

Mothering looks like life lived between. The shots between frames shared online. The moments that go unnoticed, the tiny spaces between the highs and lows. Right there, between the funny and the serious.

Mothering looks like sharing our food with sticky little fingers and insatiable teenagers. In the minds of my children, anything sitting on my plate, going to be on my plate, used to be on my plate, in my hand, in my mouth, next to me, or that I am considering eating is fair game. The same applies to beverages. Mothering is grocery shopping—again. Keeping a stocked pantry for the high schoolers who plow through before starting homework on your kitchen table. It's pulling in a drive-thru for burgers. It's making sure to tuck treats into your purse before church for the littles who will inch up next to you during the sermon. It's baking their favorite cookies and bringing them next door, their mom smiling with relief at the welcome sight of you (and the full cookie tin). It's testing a new recipe for a beloved nephew's birthday cake only to realize that the recipe is not a winner, and then running to the

grocery store for a backup cake just before the family arrives at your home for dessert.

It's applying sunscreen to every inch of our kids' exposed skin while forgetting to apply it to ourselves.

It's walking slowly next to a toddler who "can do it herself!"

It's coaching a middle schooler through feeling *all the feelings* they have in a day while somehow simultaneously finishing a school project the night before it's due.

Mothering is saying, "I'm heading up to bed" and not actually crawling in for another half hour, because of all the stops along the way to pick up each abandoned toy, put dishes in the sink, sweep up stray crumbs, fill the dog's water bowl, peek in on the sleeping kids, wash our face, quickly scroll on our phone, peek on the kids again, and then finally turn out the light until we turn it back on again when a kid wakes up. There's a season for good sleep; often, mothering is not that season.

*For everything there is a season,
a time for every activity under heaven.*

ECCLESIASTES 3:1 (NLT)

Mothering is rarely being alone. It's soaking up each and every last second of alone time (even at work or the dentist), because it is precious. It's pushing away guilt for loving that alone time so much. It's fighting the urge to check in with the family every ten minutes while you're away.

It's carrying the baby all morning, putting her down so you can use the bathroom, and picking her right back up when she cries.

Mothering is quietly completing the tasks no one will see but everyone would miss if left undone. Birthday cards and phone calls to family. Calendar keeping. Household maintaining. Replacing toothbrushes.

Cleaning toilets. Returning library books. The tasks that never cease. The tasks that keep to-do lists in business. The tasks that pop into our minds, getting us out of bed in the middle of the night to quickly complete them before they flee our minds.

It's braces and marching band and new sneakers. It's driving into rush hour traffic to make it to the birthday dinner on time. It's sending Valentine cards and wrapping Christmas gifts and remembering each precious heart in prayer.

Mothering is snuggles early in the morning. It's hair-smoothing late at night. It's making choices that are hard, but right for you and your kids. It's letting your kids go. It's holding your kids close. It's tender moments that make you teary with their sweetness, and flushed with anger, and overcome with gratitude—all in the span of a single day.

Mothering is offering a prayer when you have no words to utter.

*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.
We do not know what we ought to pray for,
but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.*

ROMANS 8:26 (NIV)

Mothering is delightful, difficult, beautiful, brutal, blessed, terrifying, sweet, good, and hard.

Mothering is surprising, mundane, ordinary, and extraordinary.

Mothering is tender, fierce, glorious, gritty, and a gift.

Mothering may not look a thing like you thought it would. It may not be anything like you pictured. But no matter what it looks like to you, for you, mothering is everything.



*Give all your worries to God,
for he cares about you.*

1 PETER 5:7 (NLT)





For Motherless Daughters

I grew up with my maternal grandmother. I never lived solely with my mother; she had tremendous issues and struggles that made it impossible for her to take care of a child.

Although my grandmother raised me, practically since birth, I never viewed her as my mother. I always knew that my mother existed, but for whatever reason, decided not to raise me. As you can imagine, this will mess with a child's mind. I have been plagued with all manner of insecurities, unyielding feelings of unworthiness, and feelings of being unlovable. I often wondered if there was something wrong with me.

I spent most of my childhood with an unconscious desire to be mothered by my mother, but it never happened. She drifted in and out of my life like the ocean's tides. Eventually, that became okay with me. She had her life and I had mine, and as time went by, our two lives rarely intersected.

As sad as all of this appears, this was my life. This is what I had always known.

But with the distance that time brings, as I reflect on my childhood, I can see clearly that the fingerprints of God were all over it! That lack of mothering actually drove me to seek out older women who would love and encourage me. Even before I knew Christ, during my junior high and high school years, God placed a couple of amazing teachers in my life who took time and invested in me.

Through the past twenty years of my following Jesus, He has been more than faithful to overflow my life with spiritual mothers. These women, these mothers have . . .

Loved me,

Encouraged me,

Blessed me,

Corrected me,

Taught me,

Wept with me,

Rejoiced with me,

Served me,

Prayed with me, and

Prayed for me.

Each and every one of them has in some way helped to shape my walk with the Lord. Scripture tells us that older women should instruct younger women in the ways of God. And now, in my late thirties and single, without biological kids of my own, I have the privilege of being a spiritual mom myself to some precious junior high and high school girls at my church. It is one of the deepest joys of my life.

As women, we are called to both mother and to be mothered. This happens no matter how old you are or what season of life you are in. This call from the Lord transcends biology, and even expectation. Whether you too know the pain that comes from being a motherless daughter, the ache that emerges from wishing for children to fill your home, or the joy that flows from being a spiritual mom, know that you are deeply loved by a God who is faithful to fill our empty spaces.



Love That Breaks the Mold

Jochebed and Pharaoh's Daughter

Now a man from the family of Levi married a Levite woman. The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son; when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months. But when she could no longer hide him, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with asphalt and pitch. She placed the child in it and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. Then his sister stood at a distance in order to see what would happen to him.

Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe at the Nile while her servant girls walked along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds, sent her slave girl, took it, opened it, and saw him, the child—and there he was, a little boy, crying. She felt sorry for him and said, "This is one of the Hebrew boys."

Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Should I go and call a Hebrew woman who is nursing to nurse the boy for you?"

"Go," Pharaoh's daughter told her. So the girl went and called the boy's mother. Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse him for me, and I will pay your wages." So the woman took the boy and nursed him. When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

EXODUS 2:1-10

Jochebed, Moses' mother, was a woman of great bravery. Her worst nightmare had come true. Her baby boy's life was in danger, and she could no longer hide him. So, she enacted a plan to save her son's life. With no idea if it would work, Jochebed placed her son, Moses, in a basket in the river, and God rewarded her bravery. He allowed Pharaoh's daughter to find the basket with baby Moses inside, who then asked Jochebed to care for him until he was old enough to live in the palace.

If this mother had let fear control her actions, she would have missed out on a miracle. Because Jochebed chose to be brave, she got to watch God care for Moses and Jochebed's entire family, protecting them and bringing about His purposes.

Jochebed's obedience and bravery also created a whole new family, allowing Pharaoh's daughter to become an adoptive mother. Pharaoh's daughter showed great bravery as well, as she boldly defied her father's orders to kill all infant boys. Instead, she took Moses in as her own.

All families—even the ones in the Bible—are messy, and each mother has a unique story regarding how her children came to be hers. Jochebed, Moses, and Pharaoh's daughter are no exception; rather, they're an example of grace, bravery, and love that breaks the mold.



A Different Kind of Brave

The day I delivered our first baby girl was filled with joy and grief for my husband and me. We were in complete bliss as I picked out which outfit she would wear for her pictures with her big brother. As the nurses wheeled her out, I remember turning the television on to pass the time until my baby was back in my arms. The words “BREAKING NEWS” caught my attention.

A shooting had taken place in an elementary school, and the station was broadcasting live footage of parents waiting for news of their children. It suddenly felt like all the air had been sucked out of the room. There I was in a hospital bed waiting for the life I brought into this world, as these parents waited for the worst.

I remember crying for those parents and those innocent children. When my baby was placed in my arms, I held her a little tighter. The headlines can sometimes shake us to the core of our souls, and fear can consume us if we let it. I think of Moses’ mother, Jochebed, and how scared she must have been when she learned that her baby was a boy. She lived in a corrupt time when all baby boys were thrown into the river.

And yet, instead of letting fear control her, she kept her son with love in her heart and strength in her soul. When she could no longer hide him, she did the hardest thing she’d ever have to do. She coated a basket with asphalt and pitch and placed her baby boy in it. Then she placed him in the reeds among the Nile.

When I used to think of the word *brave*, I imagined someone fighting off lions and bears. But it also looks a lot like a mother trusting in God

and gently placing her child into the waters of the unknown. The most beautiful part of the story is that God is faithful in all He does, and He returned Moses to Jochebed for a season, before Moses made his way to the palace under the care of Pharaoh’s daughter.

Since the birth of my first daughter and the day of that horrendous news, we’ve welcomed three more children into this world. As parents in this day and age, we may not be called to release our children into the river in baskets, but we are called to release them to God. Each time we do, we find that His provision is always better than we could ever imagine.

Fear still creeps in some days, especially since I will soon have little ones in public school. But in spite of fearing the unknown waters, I want to love relentlessly, fervently trusting in God with faith like Jochebed. I want to live a life of faith, and most of all, I want to live life with a different kind of brave.



Tiny Acts of Service, Big Celebration

Over the past week I have planned and cooked meals, scrubbed toilets, purchased white string cheese for one child and orange string cheese for another, ordered more tissues and dish soap to arrive on my doorstep, and vacuumed up dog hair under the table.

I've filled out the school permission slips and book orders that I found in backpacks. I've changed my kids' closets over for both size and seasons; today I'm diving into the shoes to do the same. I've sent pictures to be developed for "Star of the Week" day at preschool, then packed the photos up in a labeled envelope and put it alongside the requested favorite book in a backpack.

I've restocked the shower with body wash and distributed toilet paper to all the various empty rolls. I've wiped counters and cleared the table in one fell swoop. I've prayed with and for my kids and tucked little curls behind little ears at night—both ears, not just one, because I know she likes it tucked behind both.

I've brushed and wiggled teeth and hollered for hands to be washed (I don't need to see them to know they're dirty). I've helped with math homework and texted pictures to Grandma. I've tossed favorite T-shirts into the washing machine and poured water in the dog's bowl. I've watered the preschool plant project and moved it into the sunshine to try and keep it alive another day.

All in a week. A very typical, run-of-the-mill week. Extraordinary all mixed up with the mundane.

As a mother and woman, I constantly perform acts of tiny service that go unseen. All day, every day. The bittiest of details, done with barely a thought. Just thirty-seven years into being a woman and eight years into mothering, I'm still learning these are finely tuned, carefully honed skills and marks of the craft.

And because you are a woman and a mother in your own unique way, I know you likely do the same.

We are the managers of the minutiae, keepers of the details that make a home run and hearts sing, whether that home is a small apartment with roommates or farm house with kids and chickens running wild. We are the knowers of small things, of favorites and things not-so-loved. We can read a heart in one glance. We can heal with a hug. We can calm with a word. We are the hosts of each other, the middle-of-the-night texters, the hearts that reach out when we feel a friend needs us.

Moms, caretakers, grandmas, babysitters, teachers . . . every one of us is a mother of sorts, and as such, we are the unseen do-ers. We are the people of hidden service, who have learned to do things swiftly and silently in a second-nature sort of way. At times, that has rendered me feeling powerless and small. Unimportant and unimpressive. Even though I know that if I disappeared, tasks would be left undone (Hello, favorite T-shirt going unwashed. Hi, dog hair unvacuumed for a week.) and all the things I set in place could fall apart, it's easy to throw an "I don't matter" pity party for myself. It's easy for me to look to my husband, kids, coworkers, roommates, or friends for affirmation that may never come.

It's a good thing we have a God who adores and affirms women.

We have a God who appeared first to women after rising, who believes in women and has used their hands throughout history to do His good work, who sees us—both as we are and as we will be.

We have a God who sees motherhood as a valuable calling, and in His wisdom gifts us individually to mother others in the place we are.

Each and every one of those invisible tasks is seen, etched in His mind as He delights in you.

*“For the LORD your God is living among you.
He is a mighty savior.
He will take delight in you with gladness.
With his love, he will calm all your fears.
He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.”*

ZEPHANIAH 3:17 (NLT)

He. Delights. In. You.

Yep, you. You, who are a weary mother. You, who are not a mom to children of your blood. You, in the office cubicle. You, who diligently serves on the behind-the-scenes committees at church. You, who texts your friends to check in. You, who hasn't had an evening to herself in way, way too long. You, who loves being a mom. You, the woman who maintains countless unseen tasks, holds things together (sometimes by a thread), and balances plates like a boss.

You are beloved by Him. God delights in His daughters. The end.

When I was a kid, my own mom used to tell us, “I am woman. Hear me roar!” as she tarred the driveway, hung sheetrock in the basement, juggled our schedules and her jobs, and tenderly cared for her parents, her family, and her friends.

May we roar. May we celebrate our sisters and friends as they find their own roars. And may we feel the glow of love from our God who adores us, and who sees every tiny act of service.





A Love That Breaks the Mold

Ruth and Naomi

During the time of the judges, there was a famine in the land. A man left Bethlehem in Judah with his wife and two sons to stay in the territory of Moab for a while. The man's name was Elimelech, and his wife's name was Naomi. The names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They entered the fields of Moab and settled there. Naomi's husband Elimelech died, and she was left with her two sons. Her sons took Moabite women as their wives: one was named Orpah and the second was named Ruth. After they lived in Moab about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two children and without her husband.

She and her daughters-in-law set out to return from the territory of Moab, because she had heard in Moab that the LORD had paid attention to his people's need by providing them food. She left the place where she had been living, accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, and traveled along the road leading back to the land of Judah.

RUTH 1:1-7

A severe famine led Naomi's family to the neighboring country of Moab, but after Naomi's husband and two sons died at an early age, she was left alone in a foreign land. Without any way to provide for herself, she returned to Israel a broken, bitter woman. Convinced God had turned His back on her, Naomi didn't believe the Lord would change her situation, but the faithfulness of her daughter-in-law Ruth began to change her heart.

Because Ruth stayed.

She could have left Naomi, her widowed mother-in-law, to fend for herself as she traveled back to her native home in Israel. Ruth, a widow herself, could have gone back to her own people in the land of Moab. But she stayed. Even after Naomi had lost all hope, Ruth chose to remain by Naomi's side and provide for them by gleaning whatever the harvesters left behind in the fields. Ruth was a faithful daughter-in-law, and even more so, a faithful friend.

Through Ruth's friendship, God slowly softened Naomi's heart. With Ruth by her side, Naomi could see the Lord's provision in their lives. In His timing God redeemed her story, allowing her to hold and care for a new grandson. Despite the years of brokenness, Naomi lived to see the beauty that came from her suffering. And ultimately, God blessed their unconventional family with a son and grandson, continuing to use them as a family who broke the mold.



When Nothing Is Left but Love

I was in my early thirties, established in my career, and comfortable in my skin, but I was still nervous when the time came to meet my future mother-in-law. Would she like me as a person, approve of me as a daughter-in-law, accept me into the family, even with my bad-girl past?

Our first meeting was cordial, and she always made me welcome in her home. But as each year went by, I became less certain of my place in her heart and held her at arm's length emotionally. Yes, I dutifully sent flowers each Mother's Day, made her favorite dish for Thanksgiving, and showered her with presents at Christmas. But whether it was pride, anxiety, or insecurity, something kept me from building a nest for her in my heart.

Then I studied the book of Ruth. Undone by the loving-kindness Ruth showed her mother-in-law, Naomi, I realized something had to change in my life—and that something was me.

A phone call to my mother-in-law seemed the place to begin. My hand shook as I punched in the numbers. I had no real plan, trusting God to give me the words to say: *I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I love you. Can we begin again?*

When my mother-in-law answered the phone, an overwhelming sense of peace washed over me. Whatever fears I'd harbored—of rejection, of losing her as I'd lost my own mother, of not measuring up—were gone. Nothing was left but love.

The next time we visited my in-law's house, I wrapped my arms around her and gave her my first real hug. Our last five years together were

sweeter than all the years that came before then, combined. I have Ruth the Moabitess to thank for that, and the Lord she vowed to follow.

When Naomi started for home after ten years in the far country of Moab, she urged her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, to return to Moab and to their gods. Orpah was convinced; Ruth was not. She told Naomi, *“Don't plead with me to abandon you or to return and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you live, I will live; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God”* (Ruth 1:16).

Ruth was determined not to go back to her false gods. We can't say for sure, but sometimes I wonder if the Spirit of God moved through Ruth like living water in that moment—cleansing her, filling her, making her altogether new. One thing we can know is that Ruth wasn't merely making a choice to follow her mother-in-law. Her decision included a commitment to the Lord Himself, the God of the Israelites.

God alone ordained and orchestrated this sacred moment. Ruth's great-grandson would one day write, *“The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart from generation to generation”* (Ps. 33:11). Naomi and Ruth are woven into those plans. So are you, beloved. Long before Naomi and Ruth walked the earth, God's plans for you were already in place.

Before Naomi could respond that day, Ruth made a bold vow: *“For wherever you go, I will go”* (Ruth 1:16). More than one dewy-eyed bride has repeated Ruth's words while gazing into her bridegroom's handsome face. But Ruth wasn't talking to or about a man. She was speaking to and about her mother-in-law, who by all appearances didn't want her daughter-in-law along for the ride.

Ruth's second vow is equally powerful: *“and wherever you live, I will live”* (v. 16). She'd never been to Bethlehem, yet seemed to care little about where she was going, as long as she was with Naomi. She continued, *“your people will be my people”* (v. 16). It's one thing to leave



First a Friend, Then a Family

I grew up with two younger siblings and a single mom. My dad filed for divorce when my siblings and I were the same age as my kids are right now—seven, five, and three.

My mom was a superhero.

She worked two jobs: one as a fifth-grade band director at an elementary school and another as the choir director at our church. Between working days, evenings, and weekends, chauffeuring my siblings and I all over creation to our many extracurricular activities, and doing the double share of daily tasks like cooking, cleaning, shopping, bedtime, homework help, and the like, her life didn't leave a lot of spare time for friendships. But she did the best she could with what she had, as we all do, and she made time for friends.

My mom didn't attend any "girls' nights out," and she never met friends for coffee, but I did see her talk on the telephone. The long, blue, spiral cord of our kitchen phone wrapped around the island and into the living room, allowing my mom to talk to her friends while we were doing homework or getting ready for bed. She talked to them almost every night, a small circle of women whom I still respect and love. These women bucked the excuses and did friendship in a way that worked for them.

In her quiet, under-the-radar way, I saw my mom fight for friendship in a season that was completely consuming and full.

And the friendships she invested in during that time have lasted for decades.

One friend in particular has become more like a sister to my mom, a second mother to me and my siblings, and a grandmother to all of our kids. She and my mom worked together at the elementary school, both teaching music, and one day they discovered a shared love of cross-stitching. They started having stitching nights at each other's homes a few times a month, the first "girls' nights" I saw my mom participate in.

One summer, my mom was planning a road trip vacation for us, and she invited her friend to join us. She fit right into our minivan and brought buckets filled with freshly baked chocolate chip cookies. We called her Ms. Navigator, as she held the maps and could find her way back to the road after any number of wrong turns. We began traveling together every summer after that, driving cross-country during our summer vacations from school. We did Yellowstone, the Colorado mountains, Boston, and the East Coast, and each trip brought us all closer together.

When my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer, I was a high school senior. Her friend basically moved in to help us all cope and do life. She helped with math homework. She got my mom out of bed to see me in my prom dress. She cooked and cleaned and signed practice charts and read teacher notes. She talked us through the side effects of my mom's cancer treatments and helped us transition together.

Over the years she has helped plan my grandparents' funerals. She's celebrated countless birthdays and holidays with us. She's my youngest child's godmother, promising to help us raise her in faith. She shared her top secret, best-ever, sugar cookie recipe with my middle daughter on her fourth birthday, promising to help her bake up big batches to share (or sneak while Mommy isn't looking!). She's beloved by my son, recalling memories of him as a baby, promising to retell those tales for decades to come. She is as much a part of our family as any of us are.

This is a friend, mother, and aunt in my life whose love has broken the mold, and whom we can all hope to be. One who comes alongside initially as a friend and becomes family along the way. May we all be

